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ABSTRACT

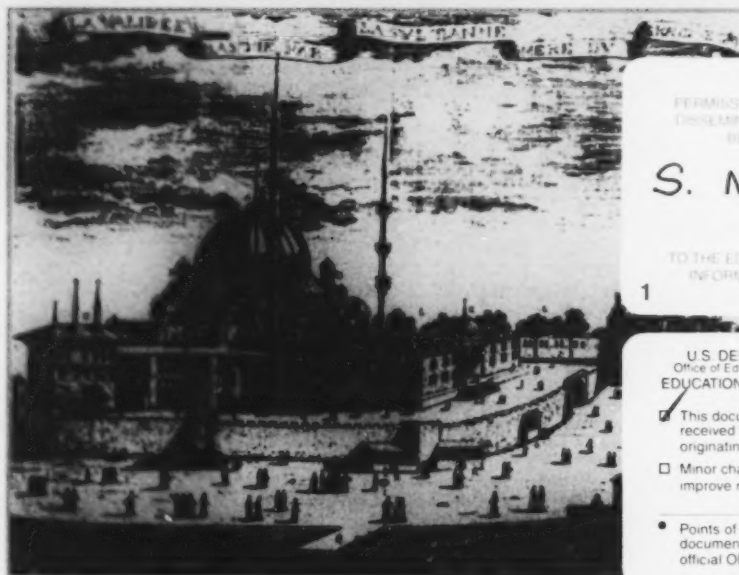
This collection of lessons broadens the scope of students' understanding of historical topics. Traditional historical topics are addressed and new perspectives are offered. Lesser known historical topics also are addressed to help give a more thorough understanding. This teaching unit is based on primary sources taken from documents, artifacts, diaries, newspapers, and literature from the period under study. The unit illustrates crucial episodes in history to help students become aware of choices made by historical figures. The purpose of this unit is to explore issues related to women in Islam as well as Muslim history. Teacher background materials consist of a unit overview, unit context, correlation to National Standards for World History, unit objectives, introduction, lesson plans, vocabulary list, and list of key names. The unit presents four lessons for students. The first lesson covers the two primary sources of Islamic beliefs, which are the Qur'an and Hadith, and includes an outline of the rights and responsibilities of women according to Islam. The second lesson outlines ways in which gender roles are conceived in Muslim society. Lesson three provides specific examples of women achieving positions of political prominence, while lesson four offers students examples of women who contributed in significant ways to Muslim culture and society and who have served as role models to other Muslim women throughout history. (BT)

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Muslim Women Through the Centuries

A Unit of Study for Grades 7-12



Valide Sultan Masjid, Istanbul
(the mother of the Ottoman Sultan ordered its construction in 1597)

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***Muslim Women
Through the Centuries***

A Unit of Study for Grades 7-12

by
Kamran Scot Aghaie



COUNCIL ON ISLAMIC EDUCATION

and

**NATIONAL CENTER FOR HISTORY IN THE SCHOOLS
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Muslim Women Through the Centuries

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Teacher's Guide

Approach and Rationale 5

Content and Organization 6

Teacher Background Materials

I. Unit Overview 7

II. Unit Context 8

III. Correlation to National Standards for World History 8

IV. Unit Objectives 9

V. Introduction to *Muslim Women Through the Centuries* 9

VI. Lesson Plans 11

VII. Vocabulary List 11

VIII. List of Key Names 15

Student Materials

Dramatic Moment 17

Lesson 1: Women's Rights and Protections in Islam 19

Lesson 2: Gender Roles and Women's Identities in Muslim Society 26

Lesson 3: Muslim Women Leaders Through the Centuries 33

Lesson 4: Famous Muslim Women as Role Models 42

Notes 49

Bibliography 51

Teacher's Guide

Approach and Rationale

In 1997, the Council on Islamic Education (CIE) began coproducing and copublishing teaching units with the National Center for History in the Schools (NCHS). By collaborating on an organizational level, CIE and NCHS are able to benefit from each organization's respective strengths and reinforce the goal of producing much-needed resources for teachers. In order to broaden the scope of students' historical understanding, CIE and NCHS share the aspiration of addressing traditional topics from new or multiple perspectives as well as addressing underrepresented topics whose exploration helps complete the tapestry of history.

To this end, we have developed the following collection of lessons titled *Muslim Women Through the Centuries*. This adds to nearly 50 NCHS teaching units that are the fruit of collaborations between history professors and experienced teachers of both United States and World History. They represent specific dramatic episodes in history from which you and your students can pause to delve into the deeper meanings of selected landmark events and explore their wider context in the great historical narrative.

By studying a crucial episode in history, the student becomes aware that choices had to be made by real human beings, that those decisions were the result of specific factors, and that they set in motion a series of historical consequences. We have selected dramatic moments that best bring alive that decision-making process. We hope that through this approach, your students will realize that history is an ongoing, open-ended process, and that the decisions they make today create the conditions of tomorrow's history.

Teaching units produced by CIE and NCHS are based on **primary sources**, taken from documents, artifacts, journals, diaries, newspapers and literature from the period under study. As you know, a primary source is a **firsthand** account of any event in history. What we hope to achieve using primary source documents in these lessons is to remove the distance that students feel from historical events and to connect them more intimately with the past. In this way we hope to recreate for your students a sense of "being there," a sense of seeing history through the eyes of the very people who were making decisions. This will help your students develop historical empathy, to realize that history is not an impersonal process divorced from real people like themselves. At the same time, by analyzing primary sources, students will actually practice the historian's craft, discovering for themselves how to analyze evidence, establish a valid interpretation and construct a coherent narrative in which all the relevant factors play a part.

Content and Organization

Within this unit, you will find: 1) **Teacher Background Materials** and 2) **Lesson Plans with Student Resources**. This unit is designed as a supplement to your customary course materials. We have chosen to pitch the various lessons on different grade levels, and they can usually be adapted to a slightly higher or lower level.

The **Teacher Background** section should provide you with a good overview of the entire unit and with the historical information and context necessary to link the specific **Dramatic Moment** to the larger historical narrative. You may consult it for your own use, and you may choose to share it with students if they are of a sufficient grade level to understand the materials.

The **Lesson Plans** include a variety of ideas and approaches for the teacher which can be elaborated upon or cut as you see the need. These lesson plans contain student resources that accompany each lesson. These resources consist of primary source documents, handouts, and student background materials, and in many cases, a bibliography.

In our series of teaching units, each collection can be taught in several ways. You can teach all of the lessons offered on any given topic, or you can select and adapt the ones that best support your particular course needs. We have not attempted to be comprehensive or prescriptive in our offerings, but rather to give you an array of enticing possibilities for in-depth study, at varying grade levels. We hope that you will find the lesson plans exciting and stimulating for your classes. We also hope that your students will never again see history as a boring sweep of inevitable facts and meaningless dates but rather as an endless treasure of real life stories and an exercise in analysis and reconstruction.

Teacher Background Materials

I. Unit Overview

The purpose of this unit is for students to explore issues related to women in Islam as well as Muslim history. The production of new units focusing on women in the histories of various regions of the world is necessary since women have historically been left out of most historical research and teaching. Fortunately, a great deal of improvement has taken place in this area in recent decades as historians and teachers alike have focused more time and effort upon including women in textbooks and the classroom. Students must be exposed to women's experiences as directly as possible by reading contemporary accounts by or about women. More specifically, students need to be exposed to more recent research, which demonstrates that women have been important contributors in a variety of areas in Muslim society. Women have been active in the market place, various professions, scholarship, the arts, literature, and politics as well as being at the heart of the family.

The primary sources provided are intended to expose students directly to Muslim women in history. It will first be shown what rights and responsibilities Muslim women were given in the Islamic scriptures. Students will be exposed to both the scripture itself and to the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad in order to show what Muslim beliefs state about women. These views will then be placed in a historical context to show them how they influenced real historical events. It will also be shown how ideology and practice sometimes radically differ from one another. Social ideals, gender roles, and female role models will also be included in order to show some of the different types of social roles and social ideals to which women often have aspired. Students will also be exposed to women in history who achieved positions of respect and prominence and who contributed in important ways to the development of Islamic culture, art, literature and scholarship.

This unit consists of four lessons. The first covers the two primary sources of Islamic beliefs, which are the Qur'an and Hadith, and which outline the rights and responsibilities of women according to Islam. Students will be asked to think in terms of how ideology and actual practice are at times the same and at other times quite different. The second lesson covers some ways in which gender roles are conceived in Muslim society. Students are to understand that gender roles have always been dynamic and fluid rather than static. Lesson three provides specific examples of women achieving positions of political prominence. And finally, lesson four offers students examples of women who contributed in significant ways to Muslim culture and society and who have served as role models to many other Muslim women throughout history.

II. Unit Context

The unit *Muslim Women Through the Centuries* may be used in world history courses, or in courses that include material relevant to the Middle East or the Muslim world. Since it is assumed that students have studied basic world history beforehand, or are in the process of doing so, the unit must be situated within the general framework of both Islamic and Middle Eastern history in order for students to understand the information given to them. Students must have already covered Islam and at least the rudimentary historical information about the Middle East and the Muslim world. Another potential use of the unit is in courses on women in history. If the unit is used in such a course the teacher needs to provide students with some background information from the world history textbook or other source before beginning the unit.

III. Correlation to National Standards for World History

Muslim Women Through the Centuries provides teaching materials to support the *National Standards for World History* (National Center for History in the Schools, 1996). Lessons within this unit assist students in attaining the following Standards:

ERA 4: Expanding Zones of Exchange and Encounter, 300-1000 CE

2A: THE STUDENT UNDERSTANDS THE EMERGENCE OF ISLAM AND HOW IT SPREAD IN SOUTHWEST ASIA, NORTH AFRICA, AND EUROPE

Therefore, the student is able to:

- 5-12 Describe the life of Muhammad, the development of the early Muslim community, and the basic teachings and practices of Islam. [Assess the importance of the individual]

2B: THE STUDENT UNDERSTANDS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ABBASID CALIPHATE AS A CENTER OF CULTURAL INNOVATION AND HUB OF INTERREGIONAL TRADE IN THE 8TH-10TH CENTURIES

Therefore, the student is able to:

- 5-12 Analyze the sources and development of Islamic law and the influence of law and religious practice on such areas as family life, moral behavior, marriage, inheritance, and slavery. [Examine the influence of ideas]
- 5-12 Assess how Islam won converts among culturally diverse peoples across wide areas of Afro-Eurasia. [Analyze cause-and-effect relationships]

IV. Unit Objectives

1. To examine the rights and responsibilities of women according to Islamic teachings from the Qur'an and Hadith, along with ways in which women pursued their rights in Muslim societies over the centuries
2. To use primary sources to make inferences about the possible social roles open to Muslim women along with role models and ideals to which Muslim women have aspired in historical and contemporary society
3. To explore Islamic teachings on the issue of equality and equity, differentiating areas in which men's and women's roles are identical, similar, different, or complementary
4. To identify Muslim women who assumed positions of political leadership as well as women who contributed their knowledge and spiritual qualities to the development of Muslim society

V. Introduction to *Muslim Women Through the Centuries*

This unit deals with Muslim women in Islamic history, which means that it covers fourteen centuries and several continents. It should not be confused with Middle Eastern history, even if this unit is used in the segment of world history that deals with the Middle East. However, the story does begin in the Middle East, where in the seventh century the Prophet Muhammad began preaching the message of Islam. According to Muslim belief Islam has always existed since the time of Adam, but was ignored or misunderstood by different communities until the final Prophet Muhammad transmitted the message for one last time in the seventh century. Thus, while Islam has prophets and even revelation in common with Judaism and Christianity, Muslims do not believe that Islam grew out of the earlier Abrahamic traditions. For example, according to Islamic beliefs, Jesus, Moses, and Abraham are all Islamic prophets. The Bible and Torah are similarly considered to be divinely inspired scriptures, although Muslims believe that their contents were misinterpreted and inaccurately preserved.

The main sources of Islamic beliefs and laws are the Qur'an and Hadith. The Qur'an, which is viewed as the actual literal word of God, was written down and preserved from the very beginning. Hadith are more difficult for non-Muslims to understand, which leads to the unfortunate, yet common, mistake of ignoring their importance altogether. Hadith are sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad which were preserved orally and later collected and written down. While Hadith are not viewed as divine scripture, they are considered to be the Prophet's religious rulings, decrees, or guidelines and are thus to be followed by Muslims. Though the Qur'an is given precedence, Hadith are used more often in legislation as well as social and religious discourse because they are more detailed and

specific, whereas the Qur'an is more abstract in nature. However, the key point here is that in practical terms, the Qur'an and Hadith are both used together as the source of Islamic laws and beliefs, rather than just the Qur'an. Therefore, educators should not present Hadith as if they are merely optional guidelines for Muslims to follow if they choose. There are many Qur'anic verses and Hadith that deal explicitly with gender related issues. However, what is stated as official doctrine or as a social ideal is not always reflected in everyday life. In other words, while Muslim women found that they had specific rights that could be enforced through legal institutions, popular practice has varied extensively from region to region as well as from urban areas to rural areas, from class to class, and across ethnic lines.

A few points should also be made concerning the controversial nature of the subject matter presented in this unit. Gender related issues are hotly debated issues in the late twentieth century. While this is generally a positive trend, it does create certain problems for the history teacher. The main goal is to discuss gender related issues objectively and accurately without being dragged into a debate on whether or not a particular event was "good" or "bad" for women in an absolute sense. There is also the problem of speaking about women as if all women everywhere in the world and of every social class believe or want the same things. Teachers should also keep in mind that students are exposed to a wide variety of images of Muslim women in the media which do not reflect scholarly understandings, or sometimes even contradict this research.

On a purely religious level, Islam stresses absolute spiritual equality along with justice in the treatment of all people. However, concerning gender, the most commonly accepted conception of social interaction among Muslims is one of complementarity and qualified equality rather than absolute equality. In other words, Islam stresses the similarity of rights and responsibilities of the two sexes while providing for the differences as well. For example, men are given the responsibility of supporting a wife, but it is allowed for women to work for wages outside the home. Likewise, a man must spend his income on his family whereas a wife's income and property are her personal property and cannot be touched by her family. And finally, men are given some rights that are somewhat different from those of women, such as inheriting (in some cases) twice as much as women. The most commonly given reason for this difference is the fact that women, whether they earn a living or not, are not legally required to spend any money on their families while men are usually required to do so. Thus Muslims do not always stress the idea of equality of Men and Women in an absolute sense. Therefore, in addition to the concept of absolute equality, students have to understand the concepts of complementarity, qualified equality and equity. For example, having differing rights and responsibilities in specific areas does not necessarily mean that one group has fewer rights than the other. It is also important to make distinctions between equality or equity in different realms, such as the spiritual, social, legal, or political realms.

The teacher also needs to keep in mind that women have been particularly active in the last century or so in rethinking socially accepted customs concerning gender, which has resulted in the adoption of numerous new interpretations and practices. This does not mean that they did nothing before the so-called modern era, but rather that the pace of change has increased in the last century. Some people have mistakenly described this process of change as having two distinct phases: the first, the "traditional" phase in which little or no change occurred and the society and culture was static; and second, the "reform" phase, in which change is endemic and dynamic. This construct is problematic in that it ignores the fact that Muslim society has nearly always been in a state of dynamic change and evolution. Looking at this unit with this in mind allows teachers and students to more accurately understand the diverse activities and contributions of Muslim women in history.

VI. Lesson Plans

- Lesson 1** Women's rights and protections in Islam and Muslim History
- Lesson 2** Gender roles and women's identities in Muslim society
- Lesson 3** Muslim women leaders across the centuries
- Lesson 4** Famous Muslim women as role models

VII. Vocabulary List

- Allah** [al-lah] Literally, "The God." Muslims use this Arabic term as the proper name for God. Muslims view Allah as the Creator and Sustainer of everything in the universe, Who is transcendent, has no physical form, and has no associates who share in His divinity. Arab Christians also use the term Allah to refer to God.
- Faqih** [fa-keeh] A person who practices Islamic Law or jurisprudence. It is similar to the Western concept of a judge, except that it includes the role of giving rulings outside of court as well. These rulings, which are given outside the court, are considered religiously obligatory for Muslims even though they may not be enforced by the state.
- Fatwa** [fat-wa] A religious and legal ruling by a scholar versed in the Islamic sciences and Shariah (i.e. Islamic law). This ruling can be given in a court, in which case it is enforced by the state, or it can be given by any religious authority with the proper training. The later type would not be enforced by the state and would be a religious obligation more than a legal one (at least, not in the American sense of legal).

Hadith	[ha-deeth] Hadith literally means "saying" in Arabic. Unlike the verses contained in the Qur'an, Hadith are records of the actions, sayings, and opinions of Prophet Muhammad himself, and constitute part of the record of the Prophet's Sunnah (way of life and example). The Hadith record the words and deeds, explanations, and interpretations of the Prophet concerning all aspects of life. Hadith are found in various collections compiled by Muslim scholars in the early centuries of Muslim civilization.
Hijab	[hi-jaab] It literally means a curtain or cloth separating two things or spaces. Commonly, the term Hijab is used to denote the scarf or other type of head-covering worn by Muslim women throughout the world. However, the broader definition of the term refers to religiously inspired dress that covers a woman's entire body, usually excluding her hands and face.
Islam	[iss-laam] Islam is an Arabic word derived from the three-letter root s-l-m. Its meaning encompasses the concepts of peace, surrender, and commitment, and refers commonly to an individual's surrender and commitment to God the Creator through adherence to the religion of the same name.
Janissaries	These were the elite military forces of the Ottoman Empire. They consisted of a large standing army best known for its effective early use of firearms and artillery.
Jinn	[jin] According to Muslim belief Jinns are creatures similar to human beings. Although they are non-physical beings, they possess, like humans, a free will, and thus may choose to obey or disobey God's commandments. They are believed to possess powers greater than humans possess, and occasionally to involve themselves in the lives of human beings, causing confusion and fright. However, not all jinns are believed to be malevolent.
Ka'bah	[kaa-bah] An empty cube-shaped structure located in the city of Makkah (Mecca) in modern-day Saudi Arabia. According to Muslim belief, it was built by Prophet Adam and later rebuilt by Prophet Abraham and his son Prophet Isma'il about 4,000 years ago. According to Muslim belief, the Ka'bah stands as the first building dedicated to the worship of the One God. The Ka'bah is made of stone, and is covered by a black and gold cloth embroidered with verses from the Qur'an.

Khalifah	[kha-lee-fah] (also Caliph) This term is used in the Qur'an to refer to Mankind as being God's <i>Khalifah</i> (or vicegerent) on Earth. However, it is also used in another technical sense to mean "successor," of the Prophet Muhammad as leader of the Ummah (the Muslim community as a whole). The Khalifah (caliph) is not a prophet; rather, he is charged with upholding the rights of all citizens within an Islamic state and ensuring application of the Shariah (Islamic Law). The immediate successors of the Prophet Muhammad, known as the "Rightly-Guided" Caliphs, were Abu Bakr as-Sadiq, Umar ibn al-Khattab, Uthman ibn Affan, and Ali ibn Abi Talib.
Masjid	[mas-jid] A term meaning "place of prostration," masjid designates a building where Muslims congregate for communal worship. The term comes from the same Arabic root as the word <i>sujud</i> , designating the important worship position in which Muslims touch their forehead to the ground. Often, the term mosque (a term derived from the French language) is used interchangeably with masjid, though the latter term is the one generally used by Muslims. The masjid also serves various social, educational, and religious purposes.
Muslim	[moos-lim] Literally (and in the broadest sense), the term means "one who submits to God." More commonly, the term describes any person who accepts the creed and the teachings of Islam. The word "Muhammadan" is a pejorative and offensive misnomer, as it violates Muslims' most basic understanding of their creed — Muslims do not worship Muhammad, nor do they view him as the founder of the religion. The word "Moslem" is also incorrect spelling and pronunciation of the word "Muslim."
Prophet	The term "the Prophet" is used by Muslims to refer to the Prophet Muhammad, who is considered to be the final prophet of Islam, and who ends a long line of prophets. In Islam the term "prophet" itself is used to refer to men who are chosen by Allah (God) to receive and transmit his divine message to humankind. It should be pointed out here that average believers do not receive revelations from Allah directly. There have been thousands of prophets throughout history, Moses, Jesus and Abraham being among them. Several prophets also are considered to have been given actual scriptures to present to humankind. These include Abraham, Moses, Jesus, David, and of course Muhammad.
Qadi	[kah-dee] The judge in an Islamic court. Qadis usually receive their education in law and religious sciences from an Islamic madrasah, which is the primary Islamic institution of higher education.

Qur'an	[kooor-aan] The word Qur'an means "the recitation" or "the reading," and refers to the divinely revealed scripture of Islam. It consists of 114 surahs (chapters) revealed by God to Muhammad over a period of twenty-three years. The Qur'an continues to be recited by Muslims throughout the world in the language of its revelation, Arabic, exactly as it was recited by Prophet Muhammad nearly fourteen hundred years ago. The Qur'an, along with the Sunnah of Muhammad, is viewed as the authoritative guide for human beings. Translations of the Qur'an are considered explanations of the meaning of the Qur'an, but not the Qur'an itself. The spelling "Koran" is phonetically incorrect; the more accurate Qur'an should be used.
Shariah	[sha-ree-ah] Literally "the path," this term refers to guidance from God to be used by Muslims to regulate their societal and personal affairs. Shariah is usually translated into English as "Islamic Law". The Shariah is based upon the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad and is interpreted by scholars in deliberating and deciding upon legal questions.
Sufi	[soo-fee] This term refers to the simple coarse wool clothing worn by Sufis in symbolic rejection of the physical pleasures of the material world. A sufi is a person who endeavors to achieve direct inward knowledge of God through adherence to a variety of spiritual doctrines and methods. These include repeatedly invoking the Divine Names of God, reciting other religious expressions, living an austere lifestyle, performing prayers, pursuing spiritual studies, living a morally righteous lifestyle, and participating in spiritual gatherings usually formed around a spiritual master with the title shaykh. Historically, sufis have been grouped into organizations known as tariqahs. In recent years there have been some people in America who have adopted the term Sufi even though they do not consider themselves to be Muslims.
Sultan	[sool-taan] An Arabic term referring to a ruler of the Muslim state. The Sultan (also called a Shah or a Malik) exercised political power but was not the religious leader of the community as the Khalifah (Caliph) was. Some Muslim scholars have considered this form of rule as illegitimate, arguing that it is based on political power rather than religious ideals.
Sunnah	[soon-nah] See Hadith.
Ulamah	[oo-la-mah], plural of Alim [aa-lim] One who has knowledge. This term refers commonly to Muslim religious scholars. (pl. Ulamah [oo-la-ma]).

VIII. List of Key Names

- Aishah** [eye-ee-sha] Daughter of Abu Bakr and the second wife of the Prophet Muhammad. She married him when his first wife Khadijah died at age 65. Aishah transmitted a large number of the Prophet's Hadith, which were compiled by scholars in early Islamic history.
- Khadijah** [kha-dee-jah] The first wife of the Prophet Muhammad. He married Aishah, his second wife after Khadijah's death. Khadijah was a successful businesswoman in Makkah who employed Muhammad as a merchant/trader because of his well-known reputation for honesty and trustworthiness. The Prophet was married to her for 25 years until her death at the age of 65 in 619 CE. They had two sons [both died in infancy] and four daughters together.
- Muhammad** [moo-ham-mad] See also Prophet - He is believed by Muslims to be the final messenger of God, whose predecessors are believed to include the Prophets Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus and others. Born in 570 CE., Muhammad grew up to become a well-respected member of Makkah society. In 610 CE., he received the first of many revelations that would eventually form the content of the Qur'an. Soon after this initial event, he was conferred prophethood and began calling people to righteousness and belief in One God. The Prophet Muhammad died in 632 CE.
- Nudar** [noo-daar] Her father, Abu Hayyan was born in Granada in 1256 CE., studied in Andalusia and North Africa, and finally settled in Mamluk Cairo. He was a Qur'anic scholar, a writer and one of the greatest Arab grammarians, and author of more than fifty works. He was father to a son, and a daughter — Nudar — who became the light of his life and his best student. Nudar was born in 1301 CE., probably married quite young and had two sons. She was exceptionally well educated, including study with noted scholars in Qur'anic recitation, Hadith and jurisprudence. She became, like her father, a scholar of the Arabic language and was counted among the intellectual elite of her era in Cairo. At the age of twenty-eight, she was overtaken by illness and died suddenly. Her father, who mourned her death for a year, composed numerous poems to deal with his grief. The poem provided in this unit, which was written by her father, is one of these elegies.

- Rabiah** [rah-bih-ah] Rabiah al-Adawiyyah, one of the most famous mystics in Islamic history, was born in approximately 717 CE in Basra [in modern day Iraq]. She was renowned for her ethical and spiritual achievements, which attracted both male and female disciples from different parts of the Muslim world. Much of her personal history has been distorted by legend, as is so often the case with 'larger than life' historical figures, but her mystical beliefs survived in her poems, which are still read today by Muslims interested in the mystical dimensions of Islam. As a mystic she pursued a path of rejecting aspects of the material world, practicing instead meditation, fasting, praying and living an ascetic life. One of her main contributions to Islamic belief was her emphasis on pure "love" as a path to divine guidance and understanding.
- Raziyyah** [rah-zee-ah] Born in India, she was the daughter of the former sultan, who was himself a Turk as well as a former slave. She became the ruler of Delhi in 1236. Most of what we know about her reign is based on Ibn Battuta's accounts of his travels to India. She led armies and ruled as any other ruler might, exercising power within the lands she controlled. She is reputed to have dressed in typical military clothing like her male counterparts and to have ridden on horseback wielding a bow and arrows as she led her troops into battle. Contemporary accounts of her rule almost unanimously praised her as a highly competent ruler.
- Valide Sultan** [val-ee-day sool-taan] This term refers to the mother of the ruler in the Ottoman empire (from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries). The term literally means "mother of the Sultan" or monarch. These women were usually involved directly in palace politics and were able to influence the Sultan to varying degrees. In some cases, the Sultan effectively left the governing of the state in her hands while in other cases she influenced him indirectly.
- Walladah** [wal-laad-ah] Walladah, the daughter of the Umayyad Caliph al-Mustakfi was a famous poet of eleventh century Spain. Her works have been praised over the centuries as being among the very best works of poetry, which was the most renowned form of Islamic literature. She never married and led an economically and socially independent life, using the substantial property and wealth she inherited to sponsor artistic excellence. Her house became a gathering place for both male and female poets and artists.
- Waraqah** [wah-rah-kah] Khadijah's cousin Waraqah was a wise old man. Very little is known about him except that he was a blind Christian who believed that the Prophet Muhammad was indeed the Prophet of God. He, along with Khadijah helped the Prophet in dealing with his shock at receiving revelation for the first time.

DRAMATIC MOMENT

The Prophet Muhammad is believed by Muslims to be the final messenger of God. Before being called upon as a messenger, he used to retreat for prayer and meditation in a cave in the mountains near his home town of Makkah (Mecca), which is in Western Arabia. The traditional Muslim account below narrates how it came to pass that at the age of forty he was called on by Allah (God) to convey his divine message to humankind. He was visited by the angel Gabriel who delivered the first verses of revelation, which collectively are called the Holy Qur'an.

Ramadan was the traditional month of retreat [in the cave], and it was one night towards the end of Ramadan, in his fortieth year, when he was alone in the cave, that there came to him an Angel in the form of a man. The Angel said to him: "Read!" and he said: "I am not a reader," whereupon, as he himself told it, "the Angel took me and [squeezed] me in his embrace until he had reached the limit of mine endurance. Then he released me and said: 'Read!' I said: 'I am not a reader,' and again he took me and [squeezed] me in his embrace, and again when he had reached the limit of mine endurance he released me and said: 'Read!', and again I said 'I am not a reader.' Then a third time he [squeezed] me as before, then released me and said:

*Read in the name of thy Lord who created!
He createth man from a clot of blood.
Read; and thy Lord is the Most Bountiful,
He who hath taught by the pen,
taught man what he knew not."*

[Qur'an, 96: 1-5]

He recited these words after the Angel, who thereupon left him; and he said; "It was as though the words were written on my heart." But he feared that this might mean he had become a Jinn-inspired poet or a man possessed. So he fled from the cave, and when he was halfway down the slope of the mountain he heard a voice above him saying: 'O Muhammad thou art the Messenger of God, and I am Gabriel.' He raised his eyes heavenwards and there was his visitor, still recognizable but now clearly an Angel, filling the whole horizon, and again he said: 'O Muhammad thou art the Messenger of God, and I am Gabriel.' The Prophet stood gazing at the Angel; then he turned away from him, but whichever way he looked the Angel was always there, astride the horizon, whether it was to the north, to the south, to the east or to the west. Finally the Angel turned away, and the Prophet descended the slope and went to his house.

"Cover me! Cover me!" he said to Khadijah [his wife] as with a still quaking heart he laid himself on his couch. Alarmed, yet not daring to question him, she quickly brought a cloak and spread it over him. But when the intensity of his awe had abated he told her what he had seen and heard; and having spoken to him words of reassurance she went to tell her cousin Waraqah, who was now an old man, and blind. "Holy! Holy!", he said. "By [God], there hath come unto Muhammad the greatest [vision], [Gabriel who came] unto Moses. Verily Muhammad is the Prophet of this people. Bid him rest assured." So Khadijah went home and repeated these words to the Prophet, who now returned in peace of mind to the cave, that he might fulfill the number of days he had dedicated to God for his retreat.

When this was completed, he went straight to the Ka'bah, according to his wont, and performed the rite of the rounds, after which he greeted the old and the blind Waraqah whom he had noticed amongst those who were sitting in the Mosque; and Waraqah said to him: "Tell me, O son of my brother, what thou hast seen and heard." The Prophet told him, and the old man said again what he had said to Khadijah. But this time he added: "Thou wilt be called a liar, and ill-treated, and they will cast thee out and make war upon thee; and if I live to see that day, God knoweth I will help His cause." Then he leaned towards him and kissed his forehead, and the Prophet returned to his home.

The reassurances of Khadijah and Waraqah were followed by a reassurance from Heaven in the form of a second Revelation. The manner of its coming is not recorded, but when asked how Revelation came to him the Prophet mentioned two ways: "Sometimes it cometh unto me like the reverberations of a bell, and that is the hardest upon me; the reverberations abate when I am aware of their message. And sometimes the Angel taketh the form of a man and speaketh unto me, and I am aware of what he saith.¹

Source: Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), pp. 43-45.

Lesson 1:

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND PROTECTIONS IN ISLAM

A. OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the rights and responsibilities of women according to Islamic teachings from the Qur'an and Hadith.
2. To look at what Islam teaches about the position of women, which can then be compared with the actual status of Muslim women in history
3. To explore ways in which women have pursued their rights in Muslim societies over the centuries.
4. To use primary sources to make inferences about the possible social roles open to Muslim women.
5. To use primary sources to compare some examples of how Islamic teachings and Muslim practices at times converge and at other times contradict one another.

B. BACKGROUND NOTES TO THE TEACHER

The preaching of Islam by the Prophet Muhammad eventually led to a movement that fundamentally transformed large areas of the world. In these regions Islam became the majority faith. These regions are often referred to as the Muslim world. The Islamic revelation, which makes up the Qur'an, proposed a different ideological and social order from what had existed in pre-Islamic Arabia, and women were affected as much men. The Qur'an and the Hadith (sayings of the Prophet) gave prescriptions for men and women which were intended to restructure society according to a new ideal.

While it is not known with any real degree of certainty what women's rights were in pre-Islamic Arabia, it is generally accepted that Islam gave women many specific rights and protections which they formerly may not have possessed. For example, Islam forbade the practice of killing one's unwanted baby daughters shortly after birth, which seems to have been practiced at times by Pre-Islamic Arabs. Additionally, education was prescribed for both men and women, women could not be inherited against their will (as if they were similar to property); their property was completely under their own control; and they could own, buy and sell property themselves. Furthermore, their earnings were their own property to dispose of as they wished; they were not obligated to spend it on their family or husband.

However, one must ask the question of how relevant these rights and protections have been in real life. Were they actually applied in Muslim society or not? The answer is not simple, but it is possible to make a few generalizations. Theory and practice at times radically differed, since not all Muslims followed the law or the prescriptions in the scripture very closely. There have always been divergent cultural practices, regional variations, and class related differences. Women's dress serves as a good example: women's dress varied from region to region, wealthier women were far more restricted in terms of covering their faces and bodies than were poorer women, and in some areas pre-Islamic dress persisted long after the majority of the population converted to Islam. There have certainly been men who violated the rights of women in their daily lives, and it must be kept in mind that many women did not know what their rights were or how to enforce them by going to court. Finally, these courts, no matter how effective they may have been were generally run by men. It has also been a common phenomenon for mothers and fathers to pass on certain cultural values that restrict women's rights to their children. However, a great deal of evidence also proves that women could and often did use the Islamic legal system to force transgressors to respect their rights.

The purpose of this section is to investigate the rights and protections women have had in Islam as well as to give some examples of how Muslim women have pursued the enforcement of their legal rights. The Islamic court system developed very early in history, and it has been relatively easy to take someone to court if one feels that a law has been violated. This is exactly what some women did when faced with abuses of various sorts. Another point worth mentioning is that while it was much more common for elite women to make use of the courts, poorer rural women sometimes did the same thing.

C. LESSON ACTIVITIES

- Activity #1:** Use the one page handout containing selected Qur'anic verses and Hadith (**Student Resource 1A**). Have students form five groups and read these sources while compiling a list of the rights and protections of Muslim Women. Have each group read out their list and write them on the board. Have them talk about individual responsibility. How are rights different from responsibilities?
- Activity #2:** Have students carefully read the historical documents in **Student Resource 1B**. Have them describe what sorts of social circumstances would be necessary in order for the situations described in the documents to have taken place. These documents allow us to imagine a scene involving women which took place in a specific place and time. Have students reconstruct the conditions required for the scene to have taken place, regarding women's exposure to, and participation in, historical situations, capability to act in those situation; apparent knowledge of Islamic teachings; consciousness of their rights; and so on. Have students list in complete sentences the conditions they have inferred for each historical scene.

Activity #3: Have students read **Student Resource 1B**, and do role playing. There will need to be six pairs of students, one pair from each group. Ask each pair to create a dialogue based on a scenario given to them. The first person represents a Muslim woman/girl named Maryam who is faced with a situation and responds to it based on the sources the students have already read.

First scenario: Maryam's father is pressuring her to marry the son of a friend of his named Ali, whom she doesn't like.

Second scenario: Maryam wants to go into a Masjid for her noon-time prayers, but her younger friend Fatimah is afraid to because she isn't sure if girls are allowed to enter the Masjid.

Third scenario: Maryam's old-fashioned aunt was discouraging her from continuing her education in school by stating that husbands don't like uppity, educated wives.

Fourth scenario: Maryam has just found out that when her wealthy uncle died, her brother took his inheritance as well as her's without telling her about it. The brother claims that he had the right to take the whole inheritance.

Fifth scenario: Maryam is chatting with Amina, who tells her that according to her grandmother a woman shouldn't want to work outside the home once she is married.

Sixth scenario: Maryam and her husband are discussing the family finances. Her husband suggests that Maryam, who owns some property and has money from her inheritance as well as her income from work, should place her money into a joint account with him to be used for covering household expenses.

D. QUESTIONS TO GUIDE DISCUSSIONS

1. Based on **Student Resource 1A**, what specific rights and protections does Islam provide for women? What is the significance of the fact that women are given these rights and protections in the scripture and by the Prophet?
2. Having read **Student Resource 1B**, do you think this court sounds like it is similar to or different from our court system? What are the similarities and differences between the two as far as you can tell?
3. Why are rights necessary for a community? Why is it necessary for legal rights to be clearly stated in the law? Do legal rights and protections generally make a difference in society? What actions must people in a society sometimes take in order to defend the rights which the law grants them?
4. Why is education not only a right but an obligation for both men and women in Islam? Is this a good thing or a bad thing? What might education have to do with pursuing one's rights?

E. INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS ABOUT THE STUDENT RESOURCES PROVIDED

SR-1A

This is a collection of Qur'anic verses and Hadith which refer to women's rights and protections. They serve as a good indicator of the basic beliefs and laws of Islam. However, one must be aware of the fact that various interpretations of these verses have always existed. therefore, students need to think not only about the interpretations but about the original verses as well.

A few other points worth mentioning: The Qur'an prohibited several customs that were abusive to women, such as the practice of men inheriting women against their will from other male relatives, the lack of inheritance rights for women, and the lack of legal protections for women's property.

SR-1B

These are court documents showing how a woman can use the legal system to get compensation if her rights are violated.

Background for Students: Lesson 1

The preaching of Islam by the Prophet Muhammad eventually led to a movement that fundamentally transformed large areas of the world. In these regions Islam became the majority faith. The Qur'an proposed a different ideological and social order from what had existed in Pre-Islamic Arabia, and women were affected as much as men. The Qur'an and the Hadith (sayings of the Prophet) gave prescriptions for men and women which were intended to restructure society according to a new ideal.

While it is not known with any real degree of certainty what women's rights were in pre-Islamic Arabia, it is generally accepted that Islam gave women many specific rights and protections which they formerly may not have possessed. For example, education was prescribed for both men and women; women could not be inherited by men from other male relatives against their will (as if they were similar to property); their property was completely under their own control; and they could own, buy and sell property themselves.

However, it should also be kept in mind that religious beliefs sometimes differed radically from everyday life. Not all Muslims followed the law or the prescriptions in the scripture very closely. There have always been divergent cultural practices, regional variations, and class related differences. And of course, many women did not know what their rights were or how to enforce them by going to court. There has also always been a problem with mothers and fathers passing on certain cultural values that restrict women's rights to their daughters.

The purpose of this section is to investigate the rights and protections women have had in Islam as well as to give some examples of how Muslim women have pursued the enforcement of their legal rights. The Islamic court system developed very early in history, and it has been relatively easy to take someone to court if one feels that a law has been violated. This is exactly what some women did when faced with abuses of various sorts. Another point worth mentioning is that while it was much more common for elite women to make use of the courts, poorer rural women sometimes did the same thing.

Student Resource 1A

1

"for, whenever, any of them is given the glad tiding of [the birth of] a girl, his face darkens, and he is filled with suppressed anger, avoiding all people because of the [alleged] evil of the glad tiding which he has received, [and debating within himself:] Shall he keep this [child] despite the contempt [which he feels for it] - or shall he bury it in the dust? Oh, evil indeed is whatever they decide! (Qur'an, 16:58-59)²

2

"Hence, do not covet the bounties which God has bestowed more abundantly on some of you than on others. Men shall have benefit from what they earn, and women shall have benefit from what they earn. Ask, therefore, God [to give you] out of His bounty: behold, God has indeed full knowledge of everything." (Qur'an, 4:32)³

3

Men shall have a share in what parents and kinsfolk leave behind, and women shall have a share in what parents and kinsfolk leave behind, whether it be little or much - a share ordained [by God]. (Qur'an, 4:7)⁴

4

...anyone- be it man or woman- who does [whatever he can] of good deeds and is a believer withal, shall enter paradise, and shall not be wronged by as much as [would fill] the groove of a date-stone. (Qur'an, 4:124)⁵

5

O you who have attained to faith! It is not lawful for you to [try to] become heirs to your wives [by holding onto them] against their will; and neither shall you keep them under constraint with a view to taking away anything of what you may have given them, unless it be that they have become guilty, in an obvious manner, of immoral conduct. And consort with your wives in a goodly manner; for if you dislike them, it may well be that you dislike something which God might yet make a source of abundant good. (Qur'an, 4:19)⁶

6

Ibn Abbas reported that a girl came to the Messenger of Allah, and she reported that her father had forced her to marry without her consent. The Messenger of God gave her the choice...(between accepting the marriage or invalidating it) (Ahmad, Hadith No. 2469). Another version of the report states that "the girl said: 'Actually, I accept this marriage, but I wanted to let women know that parents have no right to force a husband on them.'" (Hadith: Ibn-Majah)⁷

7

'Do not forbid the mosques of Allah to the women of Allah.'
(Hadith: al-Bukhari)⁸

8

"Searching for knowledge is compulsory upon every Muslim male and Muslim female. (Hadith: Ibn-Majah)

Student Resource 1B

1

Sati exchanges her cash inheritance for commercial property: Sati, daughter of Halil, from the city of Aintab, came to court; her brother Ibrahim was also present. Sati made the following statement: "As my legal share of my deceased father Halil's estate, I received 662 akfes. In exchange for this sum, my brother gave me, and I accepted, his half share in a cloth shop in the Kurtenjiler district. It is bounded in the direction of prayer by the property of Halil, on the east by a side street, on the north by the property of Ahmed, and on the west by the property of Mehmed. I have received and accepted half of the shop which is bounded on four sides as stated. Henceforth I have no suit and no dispute with my brother Ibrahim with regard to our inheritance; I quit and quieten all claims from the suit." It was ruled that both parties had ceased disputation and put aside enmity. The foregoing was recorded. (Court document from the 16th century)⁹

2

Haji Bola seeks annulment of her marriage: Haji Bola daughter of Huseyin, who is of age, sets forth a claim saying: on the 8th of March, 1625, my father Huseyin married me to the cavalry officer Mehmed Beg. When I heard this, I refused to accept it. I want that marriage annulled, and I want to marry this Ibrahim Chelebi son of Keyvan. I did not give my consent to be married to Mehmed. I have a fatwa indicating that if a female is of age, her father cannot marry her [to someone] against her wishes. [Haji Bola cites the fetwa:] If Hind is of age, can her father Bekr marry her [to someone] against her will? Can Hind have this marriage annulled and go marry another? Yes." The marriage is annulled and permission is given for her to marry Ibrahim Chelebi. [Jennings, "Women in Early 17th Century Ottoman Judicial Records," JESHO vol. 18].¹⁰

3

Query concerning a couple that doesn't get along very well:

Query: If Zeyd torments his wife in different ways and the Qadi has knowledge of this can he separate them?

Response: He can use whatever means possible to prevent this torment. (a document from 16th century Ottoman court)¹¹

4

Woman correcting the Caliph Umar: In one case, the new Khalifah (Caliph) Umar Ibn al-Khattab spoke at a Friday prayer gathering, not long after the death of the Prophet, suggesting that dowries be reduced to a symbolic sum. An old woman rose from the back of the mosque and objected, 'You shall not take away from us what God has given us.' She then recited the passage in the Qu'ran which gives the woman the right to set her own dowry and keep it as her personal property (a source of economic independence for women). The Khalifah immediately retreated saying, 'A woman is right, and Umar is wrong'. (Sakakini, 1950; pp. 129-130).¹²

Lesson 2

GENDER ROLES AND WOMEN'S IDENTITIES IN MUSLIM SOCIETY

A. OBJECTIVES

1. To explore Islamic teachings on the issue of equality and equity, differentiating areas in which men's and women's roles are identical, similar, different, or complementary
2. To explore contrasting interpretations of a text by Muslim scholars concerning the roles of men and women in society
3. To use primary source descriptions from a variety of historical periods to infer the roles women have played in Muslim societies

B. BACKGROUND NOTES TO THE TEACHER

It is important to understand that in Muslim societies, as in all other societies, theory and practice sometimes radically differ. In some cases, what is stated in the scriptures has little relevance to what is practiced. Furthermore, it needs to be pointed out to students that Islam relates to at least three continents and fourteen centuries of history. Students cannot simply judge these events according to the standards they adhere to in the time and place in which they live. Thus, it is important to connect the information to the students' lives, which requires identifying parallels and similarities between the gender roles in Islam or Muslim society and their own religion and society. However, it is equally important for them to notice that these societies also differ in significant ways from those of the twentieth-century United States.

The ideal of a woman who is a great mother, wife, and home-maker has always been very strong among Muslim women. Women of most other cultures often share this ideal as well. While domestic duties are not delineated for men or women in the Qur'an, Muslim women, like women in most regions of the world, have historically spent a substantial portion of their time working in or near the home. Giving birth to and raising children has always been more than a full time job. Students should understand that people of past centuries did not have modern domestic conveniences and that economic realities required them to have large numbers of children. These two factors alone led to a variety of responsibilities related to housework, food production, specialized spheres of agricultural production or parenting being placed upon women's shoulders. Likewise, students should understand that Muslim women have usually worked both outside and inside the home. Most Muslims who lived during these fourteen centuries were farmers. This meant that men, women and

children worked the fields side by side. Unfortunately, most people mistakenly look only at the lives of elite women who rarely left the home and who practiced seclusion and wore a full-body Hijab (one form of Islamic dress for women). This focus on elite women leads to a distorted understanding of Muslim women's experiences in that it takes non-typical women as representative of the majority of women. It is also worth mentioning that this version of full-body Hijab was one of the dominant status symbols in these societies. However, this elite lifestyle applies only to an extremely small percentage of Muslim women, and therefore should not be presented as being representative of women's experiences collectively.

Since the topic in this unit is gender roles in society and not political dynamics alone, the teacher should focus more on understanding the ideals of interactions among Muslims without limiting the discussion merely to power relationships between men and women. However, concerning power relationships, men in Muslim societies have traditionally had more legal, economic, and political authority over women than women have had over men. This is due to several factors. For example, economic or biological factors have often been important. Physical strength has always been important, as has been the fact that women are at times placed in vulnerable situations due to pregnancy and childbearing, both of which have contributed to the universal tendency of men to dominate women. Also of importance are regional cultural practices and customs, which persisted long after the incorporation of Islamic ideals into the local cultures. And finally, the interpretation of Islam itself by various religious scholars (who of course were usually men) has at times favored the authority of men preserved over women. This is important since many newer interpretations, in particular those proposed by reform-oriented women themselves, have challenged these traditionally held views. While the debates rage concerning these issues, it is necessary to expose the students to as many points of view as possible so that they can have a sounder foundation for discussion and debate.

C. LESSON ACTIVITIES

- Activity #1:** Have students read **Student Resource 2A** and ask them to identify the different ideals some Muslim women aspire to. They should use the other sources already discussed as well.
- Activity #2:** Divide the class into groups. Assign **Student Resource 2B** to each of the groups. Have students discuss the difference between the two Qur'anic verses (1 and 2). Then, have the groups give their opinion on which verse they agree with. They should debate both sides of the issue, and have the option of choosing a different interpretation altogether.
- Activity #3:** Have them read **Student Resource 2C** and have each group create a list of the qualities and characteristics of the women's roles described in the three passages. Have them point out the similarities and differences between these three roles that Muslim women may assume.

D. QUESTIONS TO GUIDE DISCUSSIONS

1. Referring to **Student Resource 2A**, what are some of the roles in society to which Muslim women may commonly aspire, either in the 7th century or the 20th century? Why is the mother given so much respect? Which roles or professions do you think would be the most popular among Muslim women?
2. Based on **Student Resource 2B**, answer the following question: Why are there different interpretations of the roles of women and men in society? Who should have the ultimate authority in the family, the man, the women, neither, both...?
3. Having read **Student Resource 2C**, what would you say is the difference between the lifestyles being described? What do you like or dislike about each one?
4. Why might Muslims believe that women and men are not identical and therefore require slightly different roles in society? In your opinion, do men and women sometimes assume different roles in society?

E. INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS ABOUT THE STUDENT RESOURCES PROVIDED

SR-2A

This source gives several examples of women working in different spheres. The first is an account of what the Prophet Muhammad said about his first wife Khadijah. The second is a similar account but about his second wife Aishah, whom he married after Khadijah died. These Hadith illustrate different ideals women have often aspired to: mother, teacher, scholar, bread winner, supporter of husband etc. The third and fourth are statements of the Prophet Muhammad concerning respect for mothers.

SR-2B

The first Qur'anic verse talks about the mutuality of support between husband and wife. The second Qur'anic verse is interpreted in different ways by different people in support of their views concerning the issue of women working for pay outside the home. Some say that only men should be the bread winners while others say that the verse only refers to periods of pregnancy or other motherly responsibilities. The final passage presents the interpretation of one man who thinks that men must be the leader in the household. This is one of the prevalent views that men have held concerning this issue.

SR-2C

The first passage was written by an Egyptian Muslim woman who was a feminist [in the Western sense of the word]. She argues here that in rural Egypt women worked alongside men in the fields. The second passage is a poem by a man praising his wife for her efforts as a home-maker. The third passage is an account of the ninth century Muslim writer al-Jahiz, who describes a court in which many women were employed as administrators and scribes.

Background for Students: Lesson 2

The ideal of a woman who is a great mother, wife and home-maker (a role model shared by women of most other cultures as well) has always been very strong among Muslim women. While domestic duties are not delineated for men or women in the Qur'an, Muslim women, like women in most regions of the world have historically spent much of their time working in or near the home. Giving birth to and raising children has always been more than a full time job. People did not have modern domestic conveniences, which meant that working around the house was a full time job. Furthermore, parenting was a major task, since they usually had very large families.

Muslim women have usually worked both outside and inside the home. Most Muslims who lived during these fourteen centuries were farmers. This means that men, women, and older children worked the fields side by side. Unfortunately, most people mistakenly look at the lives of elite women who stayed mostly in the home and wore a full-body Hijab (one form of women's Islamic dress) when surrounded by non-family members. Of course, it should be kept in mind that such elite women managed a large staff of servants as well. But in reality, this lifestyle applies only to a very small percentage of Muslim women and thus should not be taken as typical of their experiences.

On a more abstract religious level, Islam stresses absolute spiritual equality, equal responsibility in practical worship, and justice in the treatment of all people. However, the conception of social interaction of the two sexes is one of complementarity rather than absolute equality. In other words, Muslims have usually stressed the similarity of rights and responsibilities of the two sexes while allowing for the differences as well. For example, men are given the responsibility of supporting a wife, but women are allowed to work for wages outside the home. Likewise, a man must spend his income on his family whereas a wife's income and property is her personal property and cannot be touched by either her husband or her family. And finally, men are given some rights that are somewhat different from those of women, such as inheriting twice as much as women in some cases. The most commonly given reason for this difference is that women, whether they earn a living or not, are not legally required to spend any money on their husbands or their families. Men, on the other hand, are usually required to support their families. Thus the idea that men and women have exactly the same rights in an absolute sense is not usually stressed by Muslims. Instead men and women are considered to be complementary in such a way that allows them to be both different and similar in their social roles.

Student Resource 2A

1

The Prophet's wife Khadijah: "No by God, I could not find a better wife. She embraced Islam when all opposed it. She believed in me when the whole society opposed me. She helped me financially when every body deprived me. And she bore me children by the grace of God. (Hadith: narrated by Aishah)¹³

2

The Prophet's wife Aishah: The Prophet also designated his wife, Aishah, a religious authority when he said 'Take half of your religion from this ruddy-complexioned woman' (Sakakini, 1950; 128). After his death she continued to be regarded as the leading religious authority, and thus played a major role in subsequent developments in Islam. (Hadith)¹⁴

3

Mothers I: Jahimah came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and said, "Messenger of Allah, I desire to go on a military expedition and I have come to consult you. He [the Prophet] asked him if he had a mother, and when he [Jahimah] said he had, he said, "Stay with her, for Paradise is at her feet" (Hadith: al-Nasa'i)¹⁵

4

Mothers II: A man came to Prophet Muhammad (P) asking, "O Messenger of Allah, who among the people is the most worthy of my good companionship?" The Prophet (P) said, "Your mother." The man said, "Then who is next?" The Prophet (P) said, "Your mother." The man said, "Then who is next?" The Prophet (P) said, "Your mother." The man further asked, "Then who is next?" Only then did the Prophet (P) say, "your father." (Hadith al-Bukhari).¹⁶

[Note to reader: Muslims sometimes write (P) after the name of the Prophet Muhammad. It stands for "Peace by upon him" and is intended as a sign of respect.]

Student Resource 2B

1

Qur'anic verse 9:71: And [as for] the believers, both men and women - they are close unto one another: They [all] enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and are constant in prayer, and render the purifying dues, and pay heed unto God and His Apostle. It is they upon whom God will bestow His grace: verily, God is almighty, wise! (Qur'an 9:71)¹⁷

2

Qur'anic verse 4:34: Men are the maintainers of women, with what Allah has made some of them excel others and with what they spend out of their wealth. So the good women are obedient, guarding the unseen as Allah has guarded. And (as to) those on whose part you fear desertion, admonish them, and leave them alone in bed and chastise them. But if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Surely, Allah is ever Exalted Great. (Qur'an: 4:34)¹⁸

3

Interpretation of verse 4:34: Another very important term in the Qu'ran which occurs in chapter 4 (called the Women chapter) in verse 34 is the word qawwamun. This is the plural form of a word which is translated as lord, master, ruler, governor, manager. Once you make the man the ruler, obviously you make the woman the ruled. You've established a hierarchical relationship. In fact, this word doesn't mean ruler at all. There are many authorities on the basis of which I can say that it means 'bread-winner' and it is an economic term. If we translate that word as bread-winner the interpretation of the entire verse changes. It's talking about division of functions, that while women have the primary responsibility of being child-bearers. During that time when they are undergoing the process of child-bearing they should not have the obligation of being bread-winners, and therefore men should be bread-winners during this period'. (Riffat Hassan, a contemporary feminist scholar)¹⁹

4

Opinion of one scholar concerning gender roles: 'It is a fact, however, that sound administration within the domestic sphere is impossible without a unified policy. For this reason the Shariah requires a man, as head of the family, to consult with his family and then have the final say in decisions concerning it. In doing so, he must not abuse his prerogative to cause any injury to his wife. Any transgression of this principle involves for him the risk of losing the favor of Allah, because his wife is not his subordinate but she is, to use the words of the Prophet, the "queen of the house, and this is the position a true believer is expected to give his wife.' (Doi, a modern male scholar from Nigeria)²⁰

Student Resource 2C

1

Rural Egyptian woman: Consider the poor Egyptian peasant, fallah, and his wife. Both have gained a similar and equal share of experience and knowledge. Often the man recognizes the wife's superiority in making decisions. [The peasant] prides himself on the fact that he never embarks on any important project without asking his wife's opinion; she shares his work; she knows all about his daily problems – the obvious ones and the secret ones. If the husband happens to die and leaves behind orphans and as little as an acre of land as sole means of support, the widow, through sheer hard work and dedication, often manages not only to survive but even to make her assets grow...

2

The poor of both the rural and the urban sectors, even sometimes those of middle income, are helped out by their wives. Our religion does not forbid such a condition. Are we to consider them as unbelievers? These families are the backbone of Egypt and the real source of its wealth. Upon them the progress of the country relies. No, religion is not to be blamed in these matters, but, rather, customary rules which have evolved from ignorance. (Nabawiyyah Musa, an Egyptian woman writer)²¹

3

Man praising his wife for her efforts in the home: If you had seen her, even once – when she toils, with her apron around her – how she rushes and runs – in every corner, everywhere – how she turns and bends – flies from the oven to the pot – and back again immediately – how she fans the fire – and how she prepares the spices – crushes and powders them – while her pretty face – blackened by smoke – which leaves its mark on her smooth cheeks – The sight would enchant you – if you could see her at work - love for her rises from deep in my heart – since she honestly repays my love – Happiness is only granted to a man – when it gives him a wife of the same mind – a life together with her in harmony and peace. (al-Hamadani, tenth-century Arab merchant)²²

4

Women working in the royal court: "The kings and nobility had bondswomen who undertook all kinds of daily responsibilities joining the work force or staff of the diwans. There were women who attended to the affairs of people, such as Khalisah, the assistant of al-Khayzuran; and 'Utbah, the assistant of Ritah, daughter of Abu al-'Abbas al-Saffah; and Sukkar and Turkiyah, the assistant of Umm Ja'far. Furthermore, women appeared in public stylishly dressed and nobody decried that or reproached it." (al-Jahiz, ninth-century male writer)²³

Lesson 3

MUSLIM WOMEN LEADERS ACROSS THE CENTURIES

A. OBJECTIVES

1. To identify Muslim women who assumed positions of political leadership in Muslim history.
2. To describe various ways in which Muslim women exercised political power and influence in specific cultures and historical periods.
3. To explore the attitudes of some male political players concerning women's exercise of political power.

B. BACKGROUND NOTES TO THE TEACHER

With the creation of the Muslim community in Madinah in 622 CE a new form of government came into being. The Prophet Muhammad was the leader of this state and assumed a leadership role which today might be considered both secular and religious. In the seventh century the terms secular and religious were not used in the same sense as they are today. It would be more accurate to say that Muslims at this time viewed the Prophet as their leader in all areas. However, when he died in 632 Muslims needed to find someone to succeed him in this leadership function. This successor, who was called a Khalifah (Caliph), assumed all the functions of the Prophet except for his role as Allah's messenger.

The Khalifah (Caliph), who was either appointed or elected, was ideally supposed to be a religious authority as well as political leader of the state. This ideal was adhered to by the first four caliphs who are usually called "the rightly guided caliphs". However, beginning with the Umayyad dynasty in 661 (lasting until 750) the caliphate became less religiously based and more politically based in the sense that the Umayyads established dynastic succession supported by the family's political power base.

Later, in the middle of the Abbasid reign (750-1258) the function of the Caliph was restricted to a smaller sphere while military generals took over the political and administrative spheres. This led to the development of the sultanate (similar to a monarchy). Thus, we see caliphs and sultans in later centuries existing side by side, the sultan exercising political and military power, the caliph exercising symbolic authority.

However, the Ottomans put an end to this practice in the sixteenth century by having the Sultan assume the title of Khalifah (Caliph) as well as Sultan. This decision unified the two positions in the person of the Sultan who came to power through succession within the ruling dynasty. It is also important to note that for most of Muslim history numerous states and empires have existed at any given time whereas there has usually been only one universally accepted caliph at a time. Thus while the Ottoman sultan was the only caliph there were many other sultans elsewhere in the world (sometimes called Shah or Malik).

It is necessary to understand the basic political institutions of the Muslim world in order to understand what types of relationships, if any, women had to them. Firstly, it should be noted that no woman has ever assumed the title of Khalifah (Caliph) because Muslims have traditionally believed that while women could be religious scholars, theologians and mystical leaders, they could not actually assume the role of successor to the Prophet, the Khalifah (Caliph). However, in some cases coins were minted or the Friday prayer was said in a woman ruler's name, which were practices associated with both sultans and Khalifahs (Caliphs). Secondly, it should be pointed out that in some cases women were able to exercise political power both directly as the ruler of the state and indirectly as a family member of a male ruler whom they could influence or control. In fact, palace politics, which consisted largely of political rivalries involving both men and women, were central to government operations. There are of course countless examples of women achieving positions of respect, power, wealth and prominence outside the formal structure of the government. Researchers are just now beginning to uncover these more informal networks in which women participated.

In the sources provided below both types of women's participation in governing the state are presented for students to discuss. While there were women who were recognized as legitimate rulers, and who assumed all the relevant titles, the more common scenario involved indirect although effective rule through her son, husband, or brother. For example, the term Valide Sultan, which means literally "the mother of the sultan" refers to a woman whose son was the sultan. In many cases he simply loved his mother so much and was so dependent upon her that he did everything she said, thereby leaving the affairs of state effectively in her hands. Thus she exercised real power indirectly through him. It should also be pointed out that female rulership was everywhere the exception rather than the rule. However, there is a growing body of research now being conducted which demonstrates other ways in which women pursued their political interests.

The fact that women were able to gain access to political power does not, however, mean that everybody believed this was a positive or even acceptable practice. It should be stressed that no specific verses in the Qur'an address explicitly the issue of women becoming rulers, nor are the Prophetic traditions entirely conclusive. However, based on indirect interpretation, prevalent customs, and one tradition according to which the Prophet

criticized a female ruler of Iran, the Ulama (religious scholars or authorities) have usually concluded that women should not be the rulers of a Muslim state. And of course as in most societies men (at a more popular level) often felt that women generally should not rule over men. Additionally, in the complex politics and infighting of government there were always plenty of opponents and enemies to go around. Women were not exempted from having political rivals or enemies.

C. LESSON ACTIVITIES

- Activity #1:** Have the students read **Student Resource 3A** and discuss the qualities that Raziyyah is being praised for.
- Activity #2:** Hand out **Student Resource 3B**. Give only one to each group of students (two groups may have the same text if necessary). Have them read it and list what leadership roles these women assumed. Then have each group read its description as well as the source to the rest of the class.
- Activity #3:** Have the students read **Student Resource 3C** and lead a discussion of what critics were saying about a few of these women leaders.

D. QUESTIONS TO GUIDE DISCUSSIONS

1. In what ways could women exercise power indirectly? Make a list of direct and indirect ways in which women can participate in the political process both from within and from outside the government.
2. Does the fact that in some societies such as our own (i.e. the US) there has not been a women ruler or head of state reflect the status of women in that society?
3. Why might some of these women have enemies? Why might some men or women object to women holding the position of ruler of the state?
4. Based on the sources provided, how would you describe the functions of rulership that these women performed? List the different duties they performed as rulers?

E. INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS ABOUT THE STUDENT RESOURCES PROVIDED

SR-3A

This is an account of Raziyah, who became the Muslim ruler of India. The qualities of her leadership are praised. It also states that her opponents could find no fault with her, which is why they had to point to her being a woman as their only criticism. The second passage describes how Raziyah gave orders to her troops herself and became ruler. This event centers around a power struggle between her and her brother to take control of the position of rulership.

SR-3B

The first passage is a letter from Catherine de Medicis, the Queen Mother of France and the regent of King Henri III, to the Valide Sultan Nurbanu in the late sixteenth century. Interestingly, the position of these two women (i.e. Queen Mother and Valide Sultan) are almost identical. The second passage is a letter from the Valide Sultan to Queen Elizabeth I of England. The final passage is an example of the Valide Sultan seeing to provincial administration herself.

SR-3C

The first passage describes the funeral of the Valide Sultan. Some people were sad that she died while others were happy. The second passage is an example of how the military resented her ability to control the sultan so completely. The third passage is an example of a Turk praising one of the Valide Sultans for her efforts at patronizing the arts and building two grand fortresses.

Background for Students: Lesson 3

In the sources provided, two types of Muslim women's participation in ruling the state are presented. There were women who were recognized as legitimate rulers, and who assumed all the relevant titles. However, the more common scenario involved a woman exercising indirect, although effective, rule through her husband, son, or brother. For example, the term *Valide Sultan*, which means literally "the mother of the sultan" (Sultan means ruler or monarch) refers to the mother of the ruler. She was sometimes able to rule indirectly through her son. In many cases he simply loved his mother so much and was so dependent upon her that he did everything she said, thereby leaving the affairs of state effectively in her hands. Thus she exercised real power indirectly through him. While female rulership was everywhere the exception rather than the rule, there are specific examples of women participating in ruling the state.

The fact that women were able to gain access to political power in some cases does not, however, mean that everybody believed this was a positive or even acceptable practice. There are no specific verses in the Qur'an that address explicitly the issue of women becoming rulers, nor are the Prophetic traditions entirely conclusive. However, based on indirect interpretation, prevalent customs, and one tradition according to which the Prophet criticized a female ruler of Iran, the *Ulamah* of Islam (religious scholars or authorities) have usually concluded that women should not be the rulers of a Muslim state. And, as in most societies, men at a more popular level often felt that women generally should not rule over men. However, there are also Muslims who argue that there is no problem whatsoever with women being rulers. In fact, in the twentieth century, several Muslim states have had women presidents and prime ministers, while no woman has ever headed the U.S. government.

Student Resource 3A

1

Raziyyah of India: "The Princess was adorned with every qualification required in the ablest kings and the strictest scrutinizers of her actions could find in her no fault but that she was a woman. In the time of her father, she entered deeply into the affairs of government, which disposition he encouraged, finding she had a remarkable talent in politics. He once appointed her regent in his absence. When the emirs asked him why he appointed his daughter to such an office in preference to so many of his sons, he replied that he saw his sons giving themselves up to wine, women, gaming and the worship of the wind (flattery); that therefore he thought the government too weighty for their shoulders to bear and that Raziyyah, though a woman, had a man's head and heart and was better than twenty such sons." (Firishta, sixteenth-century historian of Muslim rule in India)²⁴

2

Raziyyah of India: She presented herself to the army (an-nas) and addressed them from the roof saying, 'My brother killed his brother and he now wants to kill me.' Saying this she reminded them of her father's time and of his good deeds and benevolence to the people. This led to a revolt and they proceeded against Sultan Rukn ud-din at a time when he was in the mosque. He was arrested and taken to her. She said that the murderer should be killed; and he was killed in retaliation for his brother's death....The army (an-nas) agreed to appoint Raziyyah as ruler. (A modern Arab historian's account based on the writings of Ibn Battuta)²⁵

Student Resource 3B

1

Catherine de Medicis's (Queen Mother of France) letter to Nurbanu, the Valide Sultan: The very exalted, the very excellent and magnanimous Princess, the Sultana Queen mother of the very exalted, very excellent Seigneur, and our very dear and perfect friend, may God increase your grandeur with a very happy conclusion. Knowing the lofty place Your Highness holds next to His Highness the great Emperor your son because of your rare and excellent virtues, and {knowing} that {Your Highness} will always judge wisely and surely the extent to which it is necessary that the inviolable friendship which has long existed between {His Highness's} predecessors and this crown be maintained and conserved for the common good and contentment of the two Princes, we have thought to write you to request, with the greatest possible affection, that you might use all good and appropriate offices in such a commendable work; and that you might also, to the extent possible, assist in the immediate renewal of the existing Capitulations, which have formerly been established between the predecessors of His Highness your afore-mentioned son and this afore-mentioned Crown, as things very necessary for the security of the traffic between our subjects and the lands under the authority {of your son}; in which, apart from the fact that {Your Highness} will be demonstrating that love and maternal affection that you bear for your afore-mentioned son, for whom you always seek the things that can most add to his contentment, we will forever bear you gratitude, and will by means of all praiseworthy efforts cause our sincere and cordial good will to become manifest when the opportunity arises.... (Catherine de Medici's letter to Nurbanu)²⁶

2

Letter from the Valide Sultan to Queen Elizabeth I of England: I have received your letter....God-willing, I will take action in accordance with what you have written. Be of good heart in this respect. I constantly admonish my son, the Padishah, to act according to the treaty. I do not neglect to speak to him in this manner. God-willing, may you not suffer grief in this respect. May you too always be firm in friendship. God-willing, may [our friendship] never die. You have sent me a carriage, and it has been delivered. I accept it with pleasure. And I have sent you a robe, a sash, two large gold-embroidered bath towels, three handkerchiefs, and a ruby and pearl tiara. May you excuse [the unworthiness of the gifts]. (Valide Sultan to Queen Elizabeth I, 1599)²⁷

3

Letter from Valide Sultan to provincial governor: Letters have come from Egypt apparently to you too—which describe the situation there. Something absolutely must be done about Yemen [located in southern Arabia]—it's the gate to Mecca. You must do whatever you can. You'll talk to my son about this. I tell you, my mind is completely distraught over this [the Yemen situation]...It is going to cause you great difficulty, but you will earn God's mercy through service to the community of Muhammad. How are you getting along with salary payments? Is there much left? With the grace of God, you will take care of that obligation and then take up the Yemen situation. My son leaves in the morning and comes back at night, I never see him. He won't stay out of the cold, he's going to get sick again. I tell you, this grieving over the child is destroying me. Talk to him, when you get a chance. He must take care of himself. What can I do—he won't listen. He's just gotten out of a sickbed and he's walking around in the cold. All this has destroyed my peace of mind. All I wish is for him to stay alive. At least try to do something about Yemen. May God help us with this situation we are in.... You two know what's best. (Valide Sultan, 17th century, a letter to Grand Vezir Koshem)²⁸

Student Resource 3C

1

Valideh Sultan's funeral: Some are saddened by this lady's death and others consoled, each according to his or her own interests, for just as she provided enormous benefits to many as a result of the great authority she enjoyed with her son, so conversely did she deprive others of the hopes of obtaining what they desired. But all universally admit that she was a woman of the utmost goodness, courage, and wisdom. (Ambassador Gianfrancesco Morosini, 1583)²⁹

2

The feelings of the Janissaries (armed forces): [S]uch love does [Sultan Sulayman] bear her that he has so astonished all his subjects that they say she has bewitched him; therefore they call her Ziadi, which means witch. For this reason the Janissaries and the entire court hate her and her children likewise, but because the sultan loves her, no one dares to speak. I have always heard ever yone speak ill of her and her children, and well of the first-born and his mother, who has been repudiated. (Luigi Bassano, a Venetian page working for Sulayman in the 16th century)³⁰

3

Praise of the patronage of the arts by the Valideh Sultan:

It is for all to see, the custom of the House of Osman,
It has always striven abundantly to do pious deeds.
Especially the mother of Sultan Mehmed Khan Ghazi,
That is, the valide sultan, [has striven to bestow] this gracious gift.
With pure heart she resolved to build monuments and
undertake pious deeds,
She drew spiritual succor from the friends of God.
Building two fortresses, one on either side [of the straits],
She made the lands of the people of faith safe from the enemy.
What grace, to fill in the sea on two sides,
So parallel, and this to build the straits anew.
Before now no valide sultan was worthy
Of establishing such a pious monument in this world.
(Eye witness account of Pechevi, a contemporary historian)³¹

Lesson 4

FAMOUS MUSLIM WOMEN AS ROLE MODELS

A. OBJECTIVES

1. To identify Muslim women who contributed their knowledge and spiritual qualities to the development of Muslim society.
2. To explore the literary and artistic contributions of a number of Muslim women [Nudar, Walladah, Valide Sultan].
3. To describe role models and ideals to which Muslim women have aspired in historical and contemporary Muslim society.

B. BACKGROUND NOTES TO THE TEACHER

The Qur'an enjoins Muslims to take the Prophet Muhammad as a role model. Likewise Muslims generally believe that the earliest community of Muslims surrounding the Prophet made up the best generation of Muslims. This is why they consider not only the Prophet as a role model but also his companions (both male and female). One of the most famous role models was his first wife Khadijah, whom he praised endlessly. After Khadijah's death, he married Aishah from whom he said Muslims should acquire half of their religion. She is acknowledged as a great religious scholar and spiritual leader. In fact, there are many examples of women participating in the political process in the earliest periods of Islamic history, as well as examples of women abandoning clan and tribe loyalties in order to join the Muslim community, bringing with them their property, wealth, and personal abilities.

Muslims also look to other great figures in history (poets, religious scholars, mystical leaders, calligraphers, artist etc.) as role models. Some of these were women. For example, Aishah was a prominent religious figure who transmitted the teachings of the Prophet. Similarly, Rabbiah al-Adawiyyah was one of the most famous mystical leaders of her day and had many male and female disciples and followers. She was also one of the many poets whose works are still famous today (the literary form par excellence in the Muslim world). Another excellent example is the Muslim poetess Walladah of Spain. These women were praised by both men and women for contributing to Islamic culture and knowledge.

Since Islam made education a duty for both men and women, some of the great scholars of Muslim history were also women. There are examples of women who became religious legal scholars, or even judges. Women were also employed at the ruler's court as scribes or in other administrative posts which required a high level of education. However, it should also be noted that in most of these areas of employment men were by far the majority and women were usually the exception. This does not however, mean that men were always dominant in different areas of employment. Women have been very active and sometimes the majority in certain professions. For example they almost completely dominated the production of carpets, as well as specialized areas of medicine, and in some areas such as parts of Africa, market women have been more prevalent than men. Additionally, women as scholars and teachers within women's circles were especially common place.

C. LESSON ACTIVITIES

- Activity #1:** Have students read the sources on Khadijah (**Student Resource 4A**) and have a general discussion of the qualities and characteristics she is praised for. Ask students how Muslim women might follow Khadijah's example. Have students write a one paragraph description of Khadijah.
- Activity #2:** Have students read sources about Aishah, Fatimah, and Rabiah (**Student Resource 4B**) and discuss their roles as spiritual or religious leaders in Islam. Also have the students read one of Rabiah's poems.
- Activity #3:** Have students read the poetry selections (**Student Resource 4C**) out loud to the rest of the class and discuss them. What happened to Nudar? What were her achievements? What clues does the poem offer concerning her social status?
- Extension Activity:** Have students compose a poem on a woman who is a role model for them, or whose personal qualities and achievements they admire.

D. QUESTIONS TO GUIDE DISCUSSIONS

1. Why do people need role models? What types of role models have been available to Muslim women?
2. How are these role models similar to or different from role models in our society today?
3. Why is it important for women to contribute to literature, art, scholarship and spiritual pursuits?
4. What is attractive about Rabiah, Aishah, Khadijah or Walladah as role models?

E. INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS ABOUT THE STUDENT RESOURCES PROVIDED

SR-4A

The first passage is an account of the Prophet himself praising his wife Khadijah and describing how she assumed many roles including that of bread-winner. The second passage is an account based on the Biography of the Prophet (the Sirah) written by the eight century scholar Ibn Ishaq. It describes how Khadijah and the Prophet met and eventually married.

SR-4B

The first passage shows the Prophet referring to his wife Aishah as a great religious leader. The second is an account of how the Prophet's daughter Fatimah helped him when he was being persecuted by non-believers. The Prophet then goes on to praise Fatimah. The third passage is a poem by Rabbah al-Adawiyyah who was one of the most famous spiritual leaders (or Sufi leaders) of her day. The final passage is a description of Rabbah by one of her followers.

SR-4C

The first passage is a poem by the famous Andalusian poet Walladah who was praised for her contributions to the arts. The second is a poem written by a father mourning the loss of his daughter Nudar. This poem is called Elegy to Nudar.

Background for Students: Lesson 4

The Qur'an enjoins Muslims to view the Prophet Muhammad as a role model. Muslims, also generally believe that the earliest community surrounding the Prophet made up the best generation of Muslims. This is why they consider not only the Prophet as a role model but also his companions (both male and female). One of the most famous role models was his first wife Khadijah, whom he praised endlessly. After Khadijah's death, he married Aishah from whom he said Muslims should acquire half of their religion. She is acknowledged as a great religious scholar and spiritual leader.

Muslims also look to other great figures in history (poets, religious scholars, mystical leaders, calligraphers, artist etc.) as role models. Some of these were women. For example, Rabiah was one of the most famous Sufis, or mystical leaders of her day. She had many male and female disciples and followers. She was also one of the many poets whose works are still famous today. This is important, because poetry was the most prized form of literature in the Muslim world. Another excellent example is Walladah of Spain. These women were praised by both men and women for producing great works of poetry that contributed to literature of the Muslim world.

Since Islam made education a duty for both men and women, some of the great scholars of Muslim history were also women. There are examples of women who became religious and legal scholars, or even judges. Women were also employed at the ruler's court as administrators or scribes. In most of these jobs men were by far the majority and women were the exception. This does not mean, however, that men were always dominant in all areas of employment. Women have been very active and sometimes the majority in certain professions. For example they almost completely dominated the production of carpets. In some areas such as parts of West Africa, market women have controlled some aspects of the local economy more than men. Additionally, women as scholars and teachers within women's circles were particularly common.

Student Resource 4A

1

The Prophet's wife Khadijah: "No by God, I could not find a better wife. She embraced Islam when all opposed it. She believed in me when the whole society opposed me. She helped me financially when every body deprived me. And she bore me children by the grace of God. [Aishah] (RA) said that "I promised to myself that in the future, I will never utter anything negative against Hadrat Khadijah".(Hadith: narrated by Aishah)³²

2

The Prophet's wife Khadijah: One of the richer merchants of Mecca was a woman - Khadijah...since the death of her second husband it had been her custom to hire men to trade on her behalf. Now Muhammad had come to be known throughout Mecca as al-Amin, the Reliable, the Trustworthy, the Honest, and this was initially owing to the reports of those who had entrusted their merchandise to him on various occasions. Khadijah had also heard much good of him from family sources; and one day she sent word to him, asking him to take some of her merchandise to Syria...[later, after he had worked for her for some time, she] sent word to Muhammad asking him to come to her; and when he came she said to him: " Son of mine uncle, I love thee for thy kinship with me, and for that thou art ever in the centre, not being a partisan amongst the people for this or for that; and I love thee for thy trustworthiness and for the beauty of thy character and the truth of thy speech. Then she offered herself in marriage to him and they agreed that he should speak to his uncles and she would speak to her uncle [neither of their fathers were still living at the time]... (Martin Lings, a modern scholar using Ibn Ishaq's seventh-century biography of the Prophet)³³

[**Note to reader:** Muslims sometimes write (RA) after the name of an important and respected Muslim generally, and in particular, in referring to a companion of the Prophet Muhammad. It stands for "May God be pleased with him/her" and is intended as a sign of respect.]

Student Resource 4B

1

The Prophet's wife Aishah: The prophet also designated his wife, Aishah, a religious authority when he said, "Take half of your religion from this ruddy-complexioned woman". After his death she continued to be regarded as the leading religious authority, and thus played a major role in subsequent developments in Islam. (Hadith from Sakakini, 1950:128)³⁴

2

The Prophet's daughter Fatimah: [Once] an insolent mob heaped dust and earth upon [the Prophet Muhammad's] head [note: in the early years of his mission some non-Muslims harassed and ridiculed the Prophet Muhammad in addition to rejecting the message he offered them]. As he entered his home, Fatimah wept profusely as she wiped the dust from her father's head. "Do not cry, my daughter," he said, "for God shall protect your father." The Prophet had a special love for Fatimah. He once said "Whoever pleased Fatimah has indeed pleased God and whoever has caused her to be angry has indeed angered God. Fatimah is a part of me. Whatever pleases her pleases me and whatever angers her angers me."...Fatimah's fine manners and gentle speech were part of her lovely and endearing personality. She was especially kind to poor and indigent folk and would often give all the food she had to those in need even if she herself remained hungry...She lived simply...³⁵ (Account of a contemporary Muslim)

3

Rabiah the Sufi mystic: "O my Lord, the stars are shining and the eyes of men are closed and every lover is alone with his beloved, and here I am alone with Thee." (Rabiah al-Adawiyyah, a female mystic poetess)³⁶

4

Rabiah the Sufi mystic: Rabiah used to pray all night, and when the day dawned she allowed herself a light sleep in her place of prayer, until the dawn tinged the sky with gold, and I used to hear her say, when she sprang up in fear from that sleep, 'O soul, how long will you sleep and how often will you wake? Soon you will sleep a sleep from which you shall not wake again until the trumpet call of the Day of Resurrection.' (One of Rabiah's disciples)³⁷

Student Resource 4C

1

Walladah: "I wonder, is there no way for us to meet again
After this separation, and tell again each other of our love?
Before, when you visited me during the wintry season
I spurned the brazier, so great was my fire of passion!
How can I bear this being cut off from you, alone?
Yes, Fate did hasten what I had been afraid of
Time passes, yet I see no end to your long absence,
Nor does patience free me from the bondage of yearning!
May Allah pour rain on the land where you are dwelling
From every cloud, in mighty streams, to refresh it!"

(Walladah—Twelfth-century Muslim poetess of Spain)

2

Poem about Nudar composed by her father:

My soul turned
away from this world
after Nudar settled
in the moist earth,

So my ear is deaf
when someone speaks;
my eye stares
far away.

How can I mind
whom I'm with
when I can't see
Nudar's shining face?

No. And I can't hear
her voice
whose finest words
were pearls.

If strung in verse
they'd be the blazing stars;
if scattered in prose,
they'd be the brightest blossoms.

Though she may be veiled
from my eye,
still her figure
is etched in my heart;

I've stayed by the grave
where she settled,
where fragrant musk
lingers.

There with her dwell
knowledge and virtue;
she was renowned for them
among the leading men.

In excellence,
no other woman could compare—
can a rock ever match
a jewel?

She recited the Qur'an
freshly, clearly,
without an error,
without distortion,

And adorned in ink
her page-
an embroidered tapestry
of revealing lines-

With tales of the Chosen Prophet,
with grammar and jurisprudence,
and with poetry,
always well-composed.³⁸

Notes

1. Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), 43-45.
2. Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus Limited, 1980), 402-03.
3. Ibid., 109.
4. Ibid., 102.
5. Ibid., 129.
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